

Message Text

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LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MARR GR

SUBJ: ATHENS HOMEPORING PROGRAM

REF STATE 282409

1. IN ACCORDANCE WITH INSTRUCTIONS CONTAINED REFTEL AND IN LINE WITH MY DISCUSSIONS IN WAHINGTON IN EARLY DECEMBER WITH STATE AND DEFENSE DEPARTMENT OFFICIALS, I MET PRIVATELY THIS MORNING WITH MINISTER OF DEFENSE AVEROFF AND, AMONG OTHER THINGS, DISCUSSED THE ATHENS HOMEPORING PROGRAM. I INFORMED AVEROFF THAT THE USS PAGE WOULD BE RETURNED TO THE UNITED STATES THE END OF NEXT WEEK AND THAT THE RETURN, ALTHOUGH SIX MONTHS EARLY, WAS BECAUSE OF A REQUIRED OVER-HAUL. I SAID THAT THE USS MILLER WAS SCHEDULED TO REPLACE THE PAGE AND WOULD BE ARRIVING IN THIS AREA LATER THIS MONTH. I ALSO TOLD AVEROFF THAT THE FAMILIES OF THE CREW OF THE MILLER WOULD NOT BE SENT TO GREECE AT THIS TIME AND THAT THE U.S. NAVY WAS HOLDING IN ABEYANCE THE MOVEMENT TO GREECE OF FAMILIES UNDER THE HOMEPORING PROGRAM PENDING CLARIFICATION OF THE FUTURE OF THIS PROGRAM AND THE OUTCOME OF ANTICIPATED USG/GOG DISCUSSIONS

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CONCERNING OUR BILATERAL MILITARY RELATIONSHIPS.

2. I ALSO EXPLAINED TO AVEROFF THE BACKGROUND FOR THE DE-COMMISSIONING OF THE HOSPITAL SHIP USS SANCTUARY WHICH HAD PREVIOUSLY BEEN SCHEDULED TO COME TO GREECE AS PART OF PHASE II OF THE HOMEPORTING PROGRAM. I TOLD HIM THAT THE SANCTUARY WAS BEING DE-COMMISSIONED, AS I UNDERSTOOD IT, PRIMARILY TO REDUCE UNNECESSARY COSTS IN A PERIOD OF BUDGETARY CONSTRAINT AND THAT THE MEDICAL REQUIREMENTS OF HOMEPORTED PERSONNEL IN GREECE COULD BE MET BY OTHER, LESS COSTLY ARRANGEMENTS.

3. I TOLD AVEROFF THAT NEITHER OF THESE TWO ACTIONS SHOULD BE INTERPRETED AS BEARING DIRECTLY ON THE FUTURE OF THE HOMEPORTING PROGRAM IN GREECE AND THAT, AS WE HAD INDICATED EARLIER, THE USG WAS PREPARED AT ANY TIME TO DISCUSS THIS PROGRAM OR ANY OTHER ASPECTS OF OUR BILATERAL MILITARY RELATIONSHIPS. I ALSO TOLD THE MINISTER THAT WE WOULD BE FORMALLY NOTIFYING THE HELLENIC NAVY OF THE MILLER/PAGE EXCHANGE BUT THAT I WANTED TO BRING IT TO HIS ATTENTION FIRST SO THAT THERE WOULD BE NO MISUNDERSTANDING ABOUT THE NATURE OR INTENT OF THIS ACTION.

4. AFTER ASKING ME SEVERAL QUESTIONS FOR CLARIFICATION, AVEROFF EXPRESSED FULL UNDERSTANDING OF OUR ACTIONS AND APPRECIATION FOR OUR BRINGING IT TO HIS ATTENTION IN THIS MANNER. HE WENT ON TO SAY THAT HE PERSONALLY FAVORED A CONTINUATION OF THE HOMEPORTING PROGRAM IN GREECE BUT THAT THE POSITION OF THE GREEK GOVERNMENT ON THIS POINT HAD YET TO BE FINALLY SORTED OUT. AVEROFF SAID HE FEARED THAT A DISCONTINUATION OF THE U.S. HOMEPORTING PROGRAM IN GREECE COULD POSSIBLY PRESAGE SOME DIMINUTION OF US MILITARY COMMITMENT TO THE REGION AND PERHAPS, BECAUSE OF SUBSEQUENT COSTS OR OPERATIONS CONSIDERATIONS, THE U.S. MIGHT HAVE TO REDUCE THE SCOPE OF 6TH FLEET ACTIVITIES IN THE MEDITERRANEAN AND CONCEIVABLY AT SOME POINT EVEN WITHDRAW THE FLEET ENTIRELY FROM THIS AREA.

5. AVEROFF WENT ON TO SAY THAT THERE WERE STRONG PRESSURES IN GREECE--AND EVEN WITHIN THE GOG--TO TERMINATE THE HOMEPORTING PROGRAM FORTHWITH. THEREFORE, HE WENT ON, HE WAS SEEKING TO FIND SOME FORMULA WHICH WOULD SATISFY THE POLITICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL REQUIREMENTS IN THE COUNTRY AND ENABLE THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT TO FULFILL ITS

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COMMITMENTS TO THE GREEK PEOPLE ON THE QUESTION OF GREECE'S BILATERAL MILITARY TIES TO THE U.S. AS WELL AS WITH NATO, WHILE AT THE SAME TIME PRESERVING ANY FACILITIES THAT WERE DEEMED ESSENTIAL BY THE U.S. HE ASKED ME, ON A PERSONAL BASIS, IF I THOUGHT THE HOMEPORTING PROGRAM WAS IN FACT ESSENTIAL TO THE U.S.

6. I TOLD AVEROFF THAT I WAS NOT IN A POSITION AT THIS POINT TO SPEAK ON THIS QUESTION. I EXPLAINED

THE RATIONALE FOR THE INITIAL ESTABLISHMENT OF THE HOME-PORTING PROGRAM AND SAID I WAS UNABLE TO ASSESS TO WHAT EXTENT ALL OF THE ORIGINAL CONSIDERATIONS STILL APPLIED. QUITE OBVIOUSLY, I SAID, THE HOMEPORTING PROGRAM WAS OF HIGH IMPORTANCE TO THE U.S., TO THE NORTH ATLANTIC ALLIANCE, AND, THEREFORE, TO GREECE. I SAID I WOULD INQUIRE OF WASHINGTON, ON A CLOSE-HOLD BASIS, HOW WE FELT ABOUT THE ESSENTIALITY OF THE HOMEPORTING PROGRAM AT THE PRESENT TIME AND FOR THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE.

7. WHEN I MADE THAT INQUIRY, AVEROFF SAID, I SHOULD ALSO TAKE SOUNDINGS IN WASHINGTON AS TO SOME POSSIBLE ADJUSTMENTS IN THE HOMEPORTING PROGRAM THAT AVEROFF WAS CONSIDERING PROPOSING. FOR EXAMPLE, HE SAID, IT MIGHT PROVE POSSIBLE TO NEGOTIATE A CONTINUATION OF THE HOMEPORTING PROGRAM IF THE SHIPS WERE HOMEPORTED ELSEWHERE IN GREECE RATHER THAN IN ATHENS. FRANKLY, HE SAID, HE PREFERRED ATHENS BECAUSE BEING A BIG METROPOLITAN AREA, THE HOMEPORTED CREWS AND FAMILIES WERE MORE EASILY ASSIMILATED. HOWEVER, HE FEARED THAT THERE HAD BEEN TOO MANY INCIDENTS AND TOO STRONG A REACTION IN THE GREATER ATHENS AREA TO MAKE IT EASY FOR THE CARAMANLIS GOVERNMENT TO CONTINUE TO GO ALONG WITH ATHENS AS A HOME PORT. AVEROFF THOUGHT, HOWEVER, THAT IT MIGHT BE POSSIBLE TO MOVE THE SIX HOMEPORTED DESTROYERS EITHER TO THE PELOPONNESOS OR TO CRETE, WITH THE SHIPS PERHAPS BEING HOMEPORTED IN TWO SEPARATE CITIES. IN RESPONSE TO MY QUERY, AVEROFF SAID HE WAS THINKING OF NAPLION, PATRAS OR POSSIBLY KALAMATA AS POTENTIAL HOME-PORTING SITES IN THE PELOPONNESOS, AND, IF THEY WERE TO GO TO CRETE, IRAKLION AND ONE OTHER PORT THERE.

8. I TOLD AVEROFF I WOULD EXPLORE HIS SUGGESTIONS AND THAT WE WOULD BE READY TO DISCUSS THESE AND OTHER POSSIBILITIES WITH HIM AND THE GOG IN THE NEAR FUTURE.

9. I WOULD APPRECIATE FURTHER GUIDANCE AND INSTRUCTIONS
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ON HOW I SHOULD PROCEED ON THIS SUBJECT IN THE LIGHT OF THIS CONVERSATION WITH THE MINISTER OF DEFENSE.
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